THE RIGHT MAN

By BRIAN HOOKER

THE RIGHT MAN

ALONZO KIMBALL

THE RIGHT MAN

by

BRIAN HOOKER

Illustrations by
Alonzo Kimball

New York
Grosset & Dunlap
Publishers

Copyright 1908
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

October

THE RIGHT MAN

THE RIGHT MAN

T the conventional hour of ten in the morning a highly conventional ocean-liner was departing for Hamburg, by way of Boulogne-sur-Mer—a wallowing leviathan of dusky iron swarmed over and about with fluttering fresh color and barbarous with a multeity of twittering farewells. A heavy young man perspired up the gangway and, gasping, dumped an armful of huge books

into the arms of a lighter and younger man, finely inconspicuous, who had observed his tumultuous arrival with derisive languor through wafts of cigarette smoke.

"Gi' me a cigarette," panted the new-comer, slapping five pockets. Then, breathing clouds of relief, "Thought I'd missed you this time, didn't you—you lotus-eating mazourka?"

The other twinkled appreciation. "Oh, no. I only wondered whether you'd be able to make it in a hansom or have to hire an automobile. What are these—your club-checks for last month?"

"Bach. Fugues I have met. The kind-hearted clavichord--I knew you wanted him, but I'd no idea the old sinner was so hefty, until they sent him up. If he's too heavy for any other place, eat him for breakfast to-morrow."

"Much thanks. It's like you, old man. I'm a better sailor than I look, though."

"The thoroughbred theory again—you can't kill a Gordon? Neptune's no snob, though, you'll find. Where's Tony? I'm surprised you let her out of your sight."

Gordon stared into the filthy water overside a moment, unheeding. Then

the question seemed to reach him as though from a distance, and he reacted into animation.

"Tony is packed up, sir, and she'll stay packed until I reach Paris. The idea of a violin in the polyodorous cabins of a steamer is ipecac to my soul. Besides, I don't know anybody on board; and a strange audience of these"—he waved his cigarette at the chattering decks—"Goths! Country-clubbers! Smile-mongering products of the Age of Isms, turned out in large assortments for the European market! *Navahoe* for theirs. Phoo!"

His affectation was not irritating, because he wore it like a hat—not as a

mask or a garment. One saw the quiet hazel eyes beneath, and felt that he would remove it courteously on occasion. His friend followed his gesture, caught a feminine face in the throng, bowed, and said in the tone of a mentor:

"Why, Dickie dear, how unkind! Consider the innocent pleasure and elevation of spirit you might purvey to the mid-ocean musical. Consider the soulful maid thrilled into Prossy's Complaint by your dulcet strains. Consider the plump adulation of middle-aged ladies, the mutterings of masculine jealousy. And you call yourself a musician!"

Gordon had been inattentive again. This time, however, he was gazing, not into vacancy, but with a concentration which would have been staring had he not known how to do it, at a tall, sunburnt, amber-haired girl on the hurricane-deck just above them. Presently he turned away, blew a thin smoke-wreath, and said merely: "Who is she?" Friends do not waste explanations.

"Miss Dorne, Audrey Dorne. Isn't she a wonder? I thought she was at York Harbor last summer."

"Not when I was. Let me see. The others are—hold on, don't tell me—her stodgy fiancé, and, let's see—nobody's

mother . . . her aunt! Miss Dorne's aunt, from Boston, a Unitarian. Anywhere near right?"

"'Holmes, you amaze me.' She's the tail-end of an old family—too old—so she's doing the best possible thing in marrying that fellow Hudson. He's a Captain of Industry and a golf-shark. I met him in the Metropolitan tournament. He has no soul, no nerves, no grandfather, and the body of a bull-moose. He drove with a rubber-faced iron and beat me four up."

Gordon looked again. "Oh, *that* Hudson? He *is* a rubber-faced iron, himself. Oh, dear! Why can't you and I marry all the girls worth appre-

ciating, and be sure they're not wasted? Let's go to Turkey."

"Dickie, you shock me. Come on up and meet her. Quick, there's the last call."

"I don't want to meet her. I should be jealous. I don't want to meet anybody. Go to the devil! Quit! Let go —cut it, you idiot!"

But objection was met by violence. He was hustled up the steps, books and all, struggling good-naturedly, and then and there presented to Miss Dorne; to Mr. Hudson, who said: "Pleased to meet you"; and to Miss Folcombe, white-haired and black-browed, who bowed from the waist and

said: "Ah, yes—a son of Mr. Kenneth Gordon?"

"Let me make him interesting to you, Miss Dorne," said the Irrepressible. "He didn't want to meet you, and only consented when I told him you were engaged."

Gordon's embarrassment appeared only in a baleful glance. In the midst of the ensuing commonplaces a shouting broke out below. The Irrepressible bit off a sentence, clasped hands with Gordon an instant, while the two men's eyes grew momentarily beautiful with unspoken fondness, then with a volley of Parthian adieux rushed violently down the moving gangway, leaped

asprawl on the dock and stood waving, while the steamer ponderously departed. A liner in close quarters does not move. She alters her location.

II

"YOU don't look like a musician," observed Miss Dorne. She was lying curled in a steamer-chair, one hand under her brown cheek, lazily reposeful in the sunshine. Richard Gordon's defiance of Neptune had been justified, and she had shared his immunity; but the Bostonian aunt had spent the two days in pale asseverations of perfect well-being, and Mr. Hudson, paying the penalty of robustness, had been invisible outside of Sandy Hook.

Gordon looked up from the careful filling of his pipe.

"I'm always disappointing people," he said plaintively. "They expect a maker of agreeable noises to have the hair and eyes of a cocker spaniel, the complexion of a frog's under side, and the clothes of an Israelite. But they say I write better than I play, which I valorously take as a compliment."

Her eyes appreciated his flippancy which her voice ignored. "But I'm not 'people.' And I don't mean that you ought to look oily; but—" she groped for a word, and took refuge in, "you know what I mean."

"Of course." Gordon held out his

left hand, brown as her own, thin, nervous and the least trifle unsteady. A patrician hand, highly educated—the long fingers curiously independent and the cords from wrist to knuckle clearly visible under the skin. "The answer is that all people look exactly what they are—if you look rightly." His eyes fell on Miss Folcombe, buried in steamer-rugs, and he added: "I read your aunt at first sight. Maiden lady, Boston, Unitarian, a grove of family trees surrounding an altar to propriety, and a lifetime of pure culture."

The girl gurgled. "Yes—in a hermetically sealed tube like a microbe—but that's mean, and you began it by

being very impertinent. Now read me."

"Honestly, I'd rather not try."

"I dare you." Then, after a pause, "Why not?"

"I'm afraid of guessing, working in inferences — trickery — fortune-telling —and I want to be honest."

She met his eyes quietly a moment, then looked seaward.

"If you are charlatanesque I shall detect it, and be as forgiving as you deserve. Go on." There was nothing but banter in her tone.

Gordon looked at her as he might have studied a picture. She was perfectly in harmony—the delicate fitness

of feature, the amber brightness of her hair against the warm brown of her skin, the indolence of lips and eyes, the almost feline repose in all the long, slow lines of her. And yet the whole personality bore a curious aroma of tension, an indefinite potential of the extreme, the impression that belongs to the greyhound and the hothouse rose, to the thoroughbred horse and the racing yacht—a suggestion of a type inbred, over-refined, forced to a definite perfection at the cost of normality. It evaded and pervaded, implicit in her, everywhere and nowhere. Nothing beyond herself might come of her. She was somehow ultimate; and Nature in

the eternity of evolution disregards finalities. After her, the deluge—or perhaps there was not so long to wait.

There was a tension, too, in the introspective silence, and Gordon unreadily began to speak.

"Well, of course you're a thoroughbred, and you show that. And of course you're appreciatively artistic—you care about all beauties naturally, and you're nervous enough and luxurious enough to be petulant over little every-day discords and might-have-beens. So you separate the dream-world from the world of fact more widely than they truly are. . . . You dislike fact because you fear it a little.

THE RIGHT MAN

When you want anything you want it violently, immediately—you'd fight for it if you could bring yourself to begin fighting. But the inertia of things paralyzes you, and so you accept your small failures a bit tragically. . . . You think you're practical and rather cynical, but you're not. You tell yourself stories at night, with no actual people in them. . . . You've never had a friend, because understanding implies a dialect, and you're inarticulate—you haven't any words for things. . . . Somebody must have hurt you rather badly a good while ago—a man, perhaps. And you take a pleasure in hiding and hugging Spartan foxes. . . .

Lately you've been happier than ever in what you've been taught to call the subordination of your will . . . which is really the comfort of not needing any will yourself because you can borrow at pleasure."

He stopped, startled. The wind of his speech had overblown discretion. The girl was sitting erect, wide-eyed, looking straight at him with a kind of horror.

"How do you know?" she almost whispered. "How do you know?"

"I *don't* know. I meant to stop sooner. I'm awfully sorry—"

She went on without noticing him: "How dared you see so much, or tell

me what you saw? . . . Well, I brought it on myself. And now I've got to know and admit that you exist—oh, why couldn't you have stayed away?" Then, wearily, lying back in the big chair, "Of course it's all true—and if you know those things, you understand everything there is of me. . . . *Do* you understand me?"

He caught at a straw: "Do you remember Stevenson's answer to that question?"

She shook her head.

"'God knows, madam; I should think it highly improbable.'"

"That's like a man," she said with sudden scorn, "to break into a friend's

house, wanting nothing, and then run away without showing his face, as if he might have been a thief." Both were silent a moment, the man seeking foothold, the woman expression. Then she looked up quietly. "Are you honest?"

Gordon met her eyes. "I don't know. I mean to be. At least I haven't been playing tricks on you, and I believe all I said. I'm sorry." He smiled, adding: "To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man out of a thousand."

She laughed easily. "I'm not an Ophelia, Mr. Gordon."

"You might be proud to be. Ophelia

never had a square deal. Hamlet's attitude was like this: 'If you're worth it, I'll love you; but you must be worth it alone, without love. I renounce your unworthiness.' No woman could stand that."

"And so," retorted Miss Dorne, with the full feminine contempt for feminine failure, "she went crazy and drowned herself. I never met a man who didn't defend Ophelia and wail over Desdemona—except John Hudson," she added.

"Shakespeare made a mistake in the conclusion, though," Gordon coolly continued. "Ophelia wasn't really drowned. She recovered her reason

and very reasonably married Fortinbras of Norway."

"Shakespeare?" asked the deep voice of John Hudson. "Good morning. Great day, isn't it?"

"We'd about decided it was too warm for Shakespeare," Gordon answered, rising to shake hands. "And we thought of turning to the musical glasses. How does that strike you?" He looked vaguely about for a steward.

"Good idea," said Hudson, motioning to the man who stood behind him with four tall tumblers on a tray.

III

HERE was every obvious reason why Richard Gordon should have bridled his mushroom intimacy with John Hudson's fiancée. But he did nothing of the sort. He was one of those to whom the exertion of will in cold blood, anticipating some demand of the future, is almost unconquerably distasteful. Moreover, his judgment hung in puzzled suspense over the situation. He was not lacking in what is known as Experience; and a bachelor in his middle

twenties, if he does not admit ignorance of the Duel of the Sexes, tends to consider himself omniscient therein. But this relation was a new thing, too eclectic for ordinary friendship, too frank for flirtation. They disdained or explained laughingly the parlor-magic of romance. In the smiling memory of his boy-loves, Gordon understood perfectly that he was not in love with his acquaintance of days merely because the sight of her unsteadied his pulses, because her personality hung about him like a fragrance, even because at times his nerves ached with the sheer sense of her womanhood as they had done for no woman before. But he understood

equally that he might have been, or that, given proximity and response, he might yet be. That way lay only impossibility and trouble; for her intended marriage was evidently no mere affair of convenience. Still, if he were laying up for himself any more than evanescent regret, he was free to prefer risk to renunciation, so long as he kept that risk entirely his own. The thought that Audrey might grow uncomfortably to care for him he faced for one moment of sick horror, before kicking it ignominiously into the limbo of subconsciousness. He had not misunderstood or magnified her confession; and he realized that she had said all she

meant. And so his meditation turned in a circle whose center was the one resolution he could form—to be honest from hour to hour, tell the truth in word and deed and silence, and to admit the existence of no bridge which the time had not arrived for crossing.

Meanwhile their companionship was wholly a delight. Comprehension had sprung full-armed from their common intelligence almost at the first. Already they could talk of anything, as friends talk—in broken half-phrases, sure of hitting the mark with the most careless shot. He could start nowhere but she was there almost before him, pointing gleefully toward the next goal. And ex-

cept for that one break, it had all been wholly and wholesomely normal. In the early stages of relation, the woman is warden of the personalities. Miss Dorne locked those gates. But the two multiplied the joy of discovery over unimagined common properties; and their mutual dialect soared like a driven golf-ball, rolling to rest upon new levels of understanding only to be swept again skyward. They spent more hours together than Gordon intended or understood.

When a girl wishes to be alone with a man, that event simply takes place. Miss Dorne was actually oftener with him than with Hudson; and the latter's

easy, almost cordial, acquiescence in this state of affairs filled Gordon with a puzzled, half-shameful consciousness that he himself would have both felt and acted differently. When he was not hawking after fancies with Audrey, he was generally in the company of one or more of her party. Miss Folcombe gravely liked him for his tactful whimsicality and the old-school courtliness which he assumed in deference to her, as he would have dressed for dinner at her house. Hudson liked him, without admitting it, for his fun, his intelligence, and his frank readiness to defend an opinion. And Gordon, in spite of the growing jealousy that snarled

ALONZO · KIMBALL

and bristled at the heels of acquaintance, returned the liking with interest of respect.

John Hudson was an iron man of the Iron Age with a fine development of the better ferrous qualities. From no one knew where, equipped no one knew how, he had made himself at thirty-two the already wealthy head of the great business which was his perfect expression; and since the social ladder is now so generally replaced by an express elevator, had won the position as he displayed the specifications of a gentleman. A Harvard man already cognizant of the facts might have said that he showed the lack of

college; but the discrimination, if true, was hardly to Hudson's disadvantage. Neither appearance, manner nor speech evidenced that himself instead of his mother had trained him. Success was his one god, and volition was his prophet. He had never found choice difficult nor conquest impossible. Utterly without that mental binocularity which makes Hamlets and heroes, he was immediately able. While others delayed decision or debated ways and means, he turned the search-light of his intelligence upon the instant object and moved thither, unhesitant, unhurried. Twenty times a day it was Hudson who did the thing which was to be done. A

hot rather than a cold man, his emotion when uncurbed was never unbridled. And now that a woman had set the crown upon his victories, he was admirably himself, master of surrounding circumstance, caparisoned in the panoply of achievement.

"What I like about golf," he said once, "is that it's not a game of chance, nor even a game of skill—it's a game of nerve."

"Of nerves, do you mean?" asked Audrey.

"No—*nerve*. Any duffer has skill enough to make any individual shot in the game. Every day he makes particular holes in figures that would foot

up into a record. Well, why doesn't he keep it up all the way round and win out?"

"Because he knows he can't," said Audrey slowly, as if the words meant many things to her.

"Simply because he loses his nerve. He makes a fluke and gets sore; or he makes a lucky stroke and gets rattled; or, as you say, he thinks he can't, and his nerve cracks. It's no use just to control yourself and not swear out loud—you mustn't *want* to swear—or to hurrah. You can't be bothered controlling yourself. There mustn't one thing enter your mind except where that ball has got to go next, and how you propose to

get it there. Or else, you lose. That's golf."

Said Miss Folcombe: "If I understand rightly, the game demands confidence and tranquillity."

"Not quite that. Take Audrey, for instance. She plays well until she gets into a tournament. Then she gets thinking how much she wants to win, and how pretty the cup is, and when she's driving number five, she's planning a long putt for a four on the eighteenth. Then she flukes, and her nerve goes." He looked at the end of his cigar, and added in the voice of soliloquy: "And, after all, that's the way with everything."

"But the links of life," Gordon suggested airily, "are full of blind drives and unfair lies, beset by cross winds—and there's always some burrowing mole to raise a hump on the green."

Hudson had an odd habit of looking into the last speaker's eyes, instead of into space, while he considered a matter.

He did so now for a moment, then fastened upon the concrete objective: "If there's a blind drive, it's up to you to know the course. There's a club and a stroke for every lie. If the wind's against you, play low and let it spoil the other fellow. I've no stock in hard-luck stories. One fellow's luck bal-

ances another's if they play it right. The only excuse is to make good, and then there's no need of excuses." He puffed slowly, short thick clouds. "I've a lot of men under me—all kinds. When I hire a man I put him on his honor. I say practically: 'You're supposed to be able to do what I want done. Go ahead and produce the goods. If you do, I don't have to know how; if you don't, I don't care why.' Then I let him alone. It works better than watching men and fussing over them."

Audrey crowed with delight. Here was Gordon beaten at his own game of analogy by a man to whom metaphor did not exist.

Miss Folcombe asked: "But is your trust never abused? Have you never been cheated?"

"Sometimes," said Hudson slowly; "every man is. But not in the same way twice."

IV

ETWEEN betrothal and marriage there comes to every delicately nurtured girl a reaction of panic uncertainty. The visage of the irrevocable daunts her; the glare of new sensation suddenly unveiled blurs her blank innocence and dazzles her artificially nourished understanding. She is haunted by the stagnant suspicion that she may have discovered not the one man of her instinctive seeking, but merely Man in an opportune embodi-

ment. If the Princess had been kissed into awakening by some compatriot of the true Prince arrayed in his uniform—! And to lay this specter she may, in her isolation, resort to curious and irregular experiments. With this distemper the man most concerned is naturally powerless to deal. It is a case for the mother or, better still, some safely inoculated contemporary. Wanting these, its manifestations may range from the most ephemeral cloud-shadow, through all the varieties of the Lovers' Quarrel, down to the miserable discovery of a mistake. The entire phenomenon is, of course, undreamed of in the philosophy of communication,

and forms part of those unmentioned arcana whereof the anonymous free-masonry of married men assumes a tacit experience.

On the evening of the mid-ocean musica. Audrey was effervescent with the uneasy premonition of excitement. Those eagerly officious organizers of amusement who subsist in every community had, of course, pounced insistently upon Gordon, a mild and downy lion cub obvious to the hunter. His flat refusal to play his violin was only thinly padded with some sentences about strings and sea air. But he was good-naturedly willing to play unlimited accompaniments and he permitted

himself to be featured alone at the piano.

"This kind of thing," he remarked during the day, "gives me a long, slow pain. But I suppose a man had better let himself be made a lap-dog of than make a pig of himself."

As she entered the over-decorated room Audrey was more excited than she cared to realize. She anticipated something more than esthetic pleasure from Gordon's playing—just what, she was unwilling to formulate. Needless apprehension of being too early had made the party a trifle late; and the only remaining seats were far to the front. A glance at the program stirred

her with puzzled surmises, for Gordon's choice of music was conventional to the point of irony—a couple of familiar Chopin Nocturnes, Mendelssohn's Spring Song and an arrangement of the Toreador March. She chattered nervously to Hudson, paid a politely punctilious inattention to the music, and wondered dully if the pulse in her throat were visible when Gordon's turn came to play.

The event was a chilling disappointment. He played rhythmically, with a student's unfailing precision of touch, showing an adequate emotional intelligence and a technical skill in reserve over the pieces he had selected—but

absolutely nothing more. There was no spiritual salt in it; nothing of the man, nothing of what the self-styled "musical" ignorantly worship under the title of Temperament. It was the performance of a Bachelor of Music, faultlessly unsatisfactory, perfectly academic.

"Oh, I wish he'd *play!*" she muttered impatiently, as the crowd applauded the Spring Song with tentative enthusiasm.

Miss Folcombe replied: "I think he plays very nicely indeed." And Hudson said heavily: "Why, what's the matter with his playing? I think he's mighty good. No nonsense about him,

no matinée mannerism, and he's thoroughly up to his work. I like it."

"Oh, I don't know," petulantly; "there's nothing *to* it, somehow. I wish —I do wish he'd play his violin."

Perhaps it was impotence to explain that annoyed her so disproportionately.

Hudson looked into her eyes a moment. Then he said quietly: "He shall, if you say so."

"Aunt Elma and I have both tried." A flavor of dilute defiance italicized her tone.

Hudson nodded, and the music began again. When it ended he rose, made his way to the piano, and turning, said in his resonant voice:

"Ladies and gentlemen, there is another pleasure in store for us which, I think you will agree, is as welcome as it is unexpected. Mr. Gordon has kindly consented to play for us on his violin."

Amid the swelling crackle of applause Gordon stood, angrily startled, confused, irresolute. He looked from Audrey to Hudson, and his eyes narrowed. Then with an assentive gesture he left the room.

"How dared you!" Audrey whispered. "I wish he'd refused."

"He couldn't help himself," said Hudson, utterly without complacency.

"He might have made a scene."

"*He* might not."

Gordon returned presently with his violin and some sheets of music. He came up to them, bowed, and handed the music, open, to Audrey.

"Will you make amends by playing for me?" he said, looking beyond her.

She glanced down at the score. It was the second movement of Wieniawski's B-flat concerto.

"If you're not afraid of my disgracing you . . . you can easily find . . . yes, I will if you wish it."

He had already turned away. She pulled the big diamond from her third finger, handed it to Hudson, and followed Gordon to the piano.

"How did you know I played that?" she asked, settling herself on the stool.

"You always produce the goods," he answered, with his quaint smile.

Somehow, the phrase jarred. She twisted her lithe shoulders in a manner which Miss Folcombe noticed with astonishment and grief.

"Now, don't display your accomplishments with the pedal," said the voice above her. He tuned familiarly, his eyes passing over the party-colored crowd profuse with inexpressive smiles. Then they fixed on infinity, as he raised his violin. He marked the time to Audrey with his bow, and began.

What magic dwelt in those few pieces of dry wood, carefully wrought by an old man of Italy two hundred years since? And what spell was come upon this brown boy with the sunburnt hair and the wide hazel eyes, swaying unaffectedly to the rhythm of his gracile bow? The golden wonder of his tone came straight out of the boy's heart of him into the guarded silences where his hearers lived. It was not loud, but the room had not space to contain it. It radiated everywhere, longing, imperious, irresistible, transcending sense. Was it sound or light or language? Audrey followed subconsciously, her eyes and hands involun-

tary in their work, her whole self teeming with the shower of melody. The sweet of it ached over her in waves. All his youth was in it, his sure gladness, his courage of belief in what the music meant—glamour, and the sharp mystery of dream; the sad vision of utter beauty impossibly beyond all worlds; the freshness of a love unfought for, a laughter tremulous with tears, a light that never was on sea or land.

The lingering cadence curved and closed. The shock of the applause restored her. Gordon was tuning again, the strings close to his ear, his face haggard with the strain of expression. She looked up at him timidly and a ready

smile blew away the ashes of the fire in his eyes.

"Now, play me something of your own," she said monotonously.

He looked down at her, doubting. In the tail of his eye he saw Hudson make as if to rise. He tossed his head with a sudden gesture of decision and bowed acquiescence to the imperative crowd. Hudson sat down again.

"If I play my own music," said the voice in the air, "I must do it without accompaniment."

She looked up, wondering if she only imagined the overtone of implication; but he was turned half from her, his

bow ready, his eyes puckered as if in the effort of remembering.

The violin is, of course, the most intimate of instruments; and a violin unaccompanied is almost indelicate in the nude privacy of its emotion. As she listened, Audrey felt a sense of shock, almost of shame. The presence of these many people was like a profanity—it seemed monstrous that they should listen to what she heard. Then the spell of the music possessed her, the other presences were not; and she lost the sense of hearing, conscious only of a revelation that she understood.

First came a slow, pure clematis of melody, delicate, archly fair, inno-

ALONZO · KIMBALL

cently unfolding, shyly confiding to a close. Then a rhythmic, vigorous second underran it, overbore it, nearly obliterated it, and the duality became a struggle—a struggle with an ache in it. The melody returned alone, but now, by some ineffable softening and widening of the tone, its purity seemed to have taken on yearning—to have suffered unselfishness. Then, with a hurried blur of dissonances, the struggle rearose, in the minor this time, confused among altered thirds and sixths, all freshness buried in an agony of breathless endeavor, a groping after life and light—and then, out of the weary vortex the melody took wing

once more, confident, doubtless of itself, tried and taught and wise. And before it ended, the second came in quietly and the two closed together, leaning upon each other consonantly, each clearly heard, their blending a caress. It might have meant many things—among others, the inner history of a young girl's awakening.

As he finished, and the noise broke out afresh, Gordon carefully laid down his violin. He glanced at Audrey. Then he took his bow in both hands and raised it at arm's length facing the crowd, held it so an instant, then snapped it between his fingers. The applause stopped short. People looked at

one another. And Gordon, his violin under his arm, went quickly out of the room.

He laid the instrument away, and hurried into the windy darkness of the deck, his heart clamorous in his ears, his mind tossing. He had done it now. He no more doubted the comprehension of his message than if he had written it on paper; and what was to come next? As he turned a corner a presence met him out of the darkness—a swift shadow, a fragrance, and two wonderful wet eyes.

"When did you write that?" she asked. Her voice seemed to come from far off.

"Yesterday. You knew. Did you understand?"

In the gloom her face was dimly visible—an expression without definite features, strangely white and drawn.

"I knew you wrote it to me. And I understood. But you must word things." A pause. Then, "Why did you break your bow?"

"I'm not quite sure. Some way or other, it was the thing to do."

Her breath quickened. "Because you had been forced to play?"

"Partly that. And partly—well, you drink some healths in broken glass—and I couldn't break poor old Tony—so—"

ALONZO KIMBALL

She laid a hand on each of his shoulders, looking him full in the eyes until he felt a dizziness. Then she leaned to him slowly, and kissed him lightly on the lips.

Then she was in his arms, a wild thing palsied with the madness of abandonment, sobbing with surrender. And Gordon, sick and shaken with her, was murmuring immemorable sayings known from all time of men and women, that need not be written down again.

Suddenly she struggled away and covered her face with her hands.

"It's all wrong," she moaned, "all wrong and bad and hopeless and im-

possible. Oh, why couldn't we have kept away from each other? Why must this thing happen to us?" She caught his shoulders again. "Say that you love me," she said hoarsely.

"I love you," Gordon repeated steadily, "and I take on myself all that that means; all that it needs, because I know."

"God bless you, dear," she whispered, lips, hands and eyes his own. Then she pushed him violently away, crying, "Oh, it's all wrong—all wrong!" and turned and ran through the shadows.

Gordon turned his face upward. It was beginning to rain.

V.

"THE Morning After" is rapidly becoming a legitimate phrase in the language of the intemperate American People; and since the law of action and reaction, among many others, obtains alike in physics and in metaphysics, the significance of the phrase has far outspread any reference to mere bodily intoxication. It belongs equally to that dry numbness which is the price of a glorious hour, however natural and holy, and which too often irks eager youth

with a fear that the wine of the spirit must be an evil thing because we pale after the sweet flush of it. In the low light of every-day, visions just past suffer nonentity, as a fire is put out by the sun. Common sense usurps, and sensibility turns acid. It was just after the glory of Gethsemane that Peter very humanly denied his God. John must have had the same experience; but he knew himself and waited without foolish words until it passed. Among women, perhaps because of their physical innocences, the understanding of this trouble is dangerously less general than among men.

Wherefore, in the casual gathering

of the party after breakfast, Richard and Audrey gave each other undeserved credit for an astonishing power of unconsciousness. There was not the faintest adumbration of any mutuality in the atmosphere. The night before simply had never been. And these two, looking out through the rain-flecked glass over a gray despondency of sea and sky, had absolutely no more reserve beneath their tranquil contributions to the community of mild boredom than had Miss Folcombe and John Hudson.

Miss Folcombe resurrected from a magazine to remark: "These articles would interest you, John—by the presi-

dents of the various universities on *College Men in Business.*"

"I'll look at that one when you've finished. There'd be more in it for me, though, if there were more business men in colleges."

"I've meant to ask you, some time," Gordon put in, "what you think of the contention that a college training gives a man acquaintances, and advantages in using his head, that compensate, when he finally gets to work, for the four years' time."

"There's nothing in it," replied Hudson promptly. "I've never seen a college graduate show any compensation for his scattering of energy and his

inexperience of things that are a-b-c to the office-boy. It'll be college or business for my son when he gets old enough to choose—the combination isn't good economy."

"You're prejudiced," said Audrey, looking out at the rain.

"Naturally, but my prejudices never dictate in a practical judgment. I rather tend to overrate college in general, like most men who haven't had it. But this is a matter of fact. For the professional man it all pays in the long run—friendships, mental training, education by the surroundings—it all counts in. But if a fellow's going into business, college won't be worth while.

It isn't reasonable that it should. He forms a lot of footless habits, and develops tastes that he can't afford time or money for, and learns a lot of things from books and book-men that won't be any use to him. And then he has the handicap of four good years and more or less nonsense to unlearn. Why, the average college man thinks it's of no importance when he pays his bills."

"He gets over that pretty quickly, though," said Gordon. "I don't believe there's any dishonesty about it—and the result teaches him sense."

"That's just it—he regards honesty as a virtue, instead of a matter like washing his hands. He has no concep-

tion that a hundred dollars to-day isn't a hundred dollars a year from now. That's just the trouble—he makes it all ethical and personal, and it's discourteous to send him a bill. No, the whole theory is university advertising—there's nothing in it."

"That's reasonable, but I think it's extreme. You don't really think that college is all duns and cigarettes. It isn't the college man who defaults for half a million after ten irreproachable years—it' s your bred-in-the-bone ex-office-boy with strictly business ideals and a hunch on the market. And then, a thoroughbred is better stuff to handle, all through—he may need more licking

into shape, but you know you're not wasting labor on shoddy material."

Said Miss Folcombe: "Isn't that, after all, the real point, John? Education aside, the collegian is more likely to be a man of family; and blood will tell, you know, in anything."

"Not a bit of it," Audrey spoke with sudden emphasis. "John is right. Success is what counts. All that talk about family as a sort of talisman is a fiction. I don't believe in triumphant failure and spiritual victory and all that. Breeding only makes a man more sensitive, more self-conscious, more open to attack. He knows when he's hurt, and he thinks about himself, and he plays

according to the rules. He fights till he's beaten, just like any man, and he's all the more apt to be beaten for making ballades while he fences. Cyrano makes me sick—if he'd been a man instead of a coat-of-arms he'd have had Roxane for himself. And then, when your gentle very perfect knight is licked, he watches the enemy out of sight and then crows, 'I am the captain of my soul,' like a chicken. He's handicapped by knowing that he has a soul. The thing I hate most on earth is that I'm a Dorne and can't help it."

Miss Folcombe's deity was blasphemed. She fairly held up her hands.

"Why, Audrey!" Speech was inadequate.

"You're all wrong." Richard mounted his pet hobby. "That's sheer cheap Jack-Londonism. It simply isn't so. Other things being anywhere near equal, good blood wins out every time. Your thoroughbred may suffer more, he may hate to fight, he may be sick afraid all through it, even—but *he won't give in.* The other fellow likes fighting, he doesn't feel punishment, he'll win out the little fights that neither cares much about. But when he gets to the point where he does feel hurt and knows he's past hope—then he lies down. The yellow streak may

be deep in, but if you get down to it, it's all over. Now, the gentleman has been in despair for half the fight, but he hangs on in spite of it. He's stronger than himself." He turned to Audrey. "You never saw a cock-fight, of course. Well, the real game chicken doesn't crow when he's licked, because he isn't licked until he's dead. That modern theory of yours sounds brutally grand, Miss Dorne, but all fact and history are against it. It's just a decadent bull-worship, and it's false."

Miss Folcombe almost applauded. Hudson had been looking at the speakers in turn. He came in deliberately:

"No, you're half right, Gordon, but

you aren't logical. Granted about horses and roosters—but there's no analogy between breeding in animals and family in human beings. 'Family' only means a breeding selection not for any practical qualities, but for sensibility and social graces—and of course those are the only sure results. A man bred like a race-horse might turn out as well; but there's no such thing except by accident, don't you see? And anyway, human heredity is a subject we don't know much about. No, your analogy doesn't hold water. History's against you, too. Look at the world's aristocracies and their inevitable losing fight against the barbarian."

"And look at Thermopylæ, and Alfred, and Robert Browning, and Stevenson, and Washington," Gordon retorted. "We're splitting on a definition of breeding, that's all. Of course, there are imitations, but 'family' means at its best more than man-millinery, and you know it. We've really agreed on the meaning of the word. You know about the business side of it, and I don't doubt your opinion of the college product—but you take the Yale or Harvard man, the real thing, with his traditions, and put him in a really tight place in business or anywhere else—and he won't fall down. Pure gold's a bit soft for commercial pur-

poses, but try an acid on it—haven't you found that so?"

"No," said Hudson slowly, "I haven't met with that situation. You see, it's this way." He thought a moment, his eyes steadily on Gordon's. "Every man has his limit. Granting everything you say, the thoroughbred's limit is his life; the ordinary man's is his hope. Well, now, in nine cases out of ten your thoroughbred will reach his limit first, that's all. He'll be dead before the other man begins to despair, because the chances are against his being the stronger. Take you and me, for instance. If we got up against each other, you might take a lot of beating

—you might never give up. I don't know just where my despairing point is located. But I'd be likely to win out because I shouldn't waste time or thought on anything but landing the next blow and getting my weight behind it. Whereas you'd be thinking it all over all the time. Take last night, for instance."

"Yes," Gordon repeated, "take last night, for instance," adding, with a laugh, "well, your *argumentum ad hominem* closes the discussion, unless we refer to wager of battle, which Heaven forfend! I believe I'm right, still, but I can see that there's a lot in your point of view."

"That's the trouble with you," Audrey broke in wearily. "You're always looking at the other man's point of view." The resentment in her voice was uncalled for.

A few minutes later the exodus for lunch left them alone a moment, and Audrey caught up the lapsed reality as if the last twelve hours had been a momentary interruption.

"Listen, Richard. You mustn't do anything. I'm right about this. It's no use. We must just—forget."

"And then? You're talking nonsense, you know."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tell John Hudson the truth. After that—we'll see."

"What's the use? You don't know him. No, you don't. He'll just brush you aside—oh, you mustn't *try* to fight. Don't make it worse for me than it is. It isn't real—drop it; drop it now." There was only a dry boredom in her voice.

"It's going to be real—and you are going to do the hardest thing of all—sit still and do nothing."

"You think I don't know, Richard . . . oh, I don't know *how* I feel—can't you hold me? Why don't you *make* me do something? I—" He stopped her.

"Don't tell me that now. Tell me you trust me. It's all right."

"I do trust you." She was somehow nearer without having moved. There was no mistaking the reckless demand in her eyes.

Life strained like a tuned string. On the glass one raindrop grew too heavy and zigzagged down across the gray pane. Gordon began mechanically hunting for his handkerchief, as he said lightly:

"There's a certain amount of daylight here."

"Oh—you, you! That's just you all over!" Then, with burlesque conventionality, "Really, Mr. Gordon, we

shall be late for our luncheon, you know." She swung her skirts and swept away. Gordon followed laughingly. He found his handkerchief in time to hide the blood that was running from his under-lip.

VI

H, Hudson, I've something to talk over with you, if that log will continue to work a while without your supervision."

Hudson turned from the taffrail, wet, red and genial. "Hullo. Where have you kept yourself all afternoon? Sure, fire away, if you can make me hear in this wind."

"I can't. Let's go down in the smoker. If we want wetness we can take it internally."

Hudson followed without comment. Gordon went straight to a little corner table, out of immediate earshot of the narcotic groups, settled into the leathered seat, and pressed a button.

"Cigar?" Hudson offered his case.

"Thanks, I've a cigarette going." Gordon deliberately manipulated the siphon. "Say when . . . that right?" He half filled his own glass, tasted it, and blew a deep breath of thin smoke. "Well, here's looking."

"Happy days," Hudson touched glasses carelessly, and leaned back to cut his cigar. "What's the row?"

Richard leaned forward suddenly. "Hold on a second—save that cigar-

band . . . thanks. My kid brother collects them."

To the uninitiated, the golfer's waggle before the drive appears like ostentation of skill. Gordon put the cigar-band elaborately away, flipped off his ashes and inhaled again. When he spoke his tone was carefully low, level and distinct.

"I've been wanting to speak to you about Miss Dorne."

"We won't discuss Miss Dorne." Hudson's careless finality absolutely annihilated the topic. Gordon evenly went on:

"It's a very simple point. I think you have no right to marry her. And

so, naturally, you are not going to marry her—for the reason that, in spite of the great qualities which I should be impertinent, under the circumstances, to dilate upon, you are not the right man for her. It isn't to be. Is that clear?"

For the first time in his life Hudson was surprised off his guard. He did not know how to meet a man who actualized the inconceivable. He showed no sign, looked steadily into his antagonist's wide eyes, and waited, thinking hard. Gordon finished his drink and resumed:

"It's really beside the question, but of course my reason for knowing this,

and for speaking to you of it, is that I am the one right man in the world, myself. I've told her so, of course." He smoked. "The situation is unfortunate, just now, for us all; but I thought best that we should all three possess the facts in the case right away. That's all."

Hudson had found the immediate thing to be done.

"I see," he said calmly. "Now, what do you want me to do about it?"

It was the feint of a master-fighter and it did its work. Gordon had expected rage, and had calculated time and place accordingly; he had prepared for a contemptuous putting

aside, for an immediate triangular scene, for the allegation of insanity. But the exterior of acquiescence uncovered the one joint in his armor. He hesitated, stammered. The iron man relentlessly drove home his blow.

"You see, you don't know what you want. You have only a boyish notion of stirring up some sort of a disturbance to correspond with your own feelings. You make the same mistake as most artistic people, of thinking that every man who hasn't your particular kind of nerves and your emotional view of things is a sort of brute. I understand all about this. You meet an attractive girl, and you talk to her, and play to

her, and in three days you convince yourself that you've met your affinity —which is all bosh. Then you tell the girl and, she being recently engaged and very nervous, you make her think you understand her as no one else does —I know all about that old trick—and then you both go into heroics, and you come to me. Well, it's unfortunate, but it's nothing very unusual. I'm sorry for you because you're sincere; but you'll find that nothing very much will happen."

"Excuse me," Gordon put in, "aren't you ready for another drink?"

Hudson grinned. He was a very good poker-player. "Thanks, it's my

turn," he said, ringing the bell. They smoked in silence until the drinks came; then he continued:

"Now you just sit tight and let things take their normal course. Cool off. You've made some trouble and the manly thing for you to do is just to forget it and be around with us in a rational way, just as if nothing had happened. If you think there's anything in your idea, wait and see. Only," the iron rang in his tone, "no heroics—no soulful talks. You won't be allowed to make any more disturbance."

"I'm glad you look at it that way," Gordon remarked. "There'll be as little trouble as I can manage. What

there is will be of your making, because Miss Dorne is going to marry me."

Hudson leaned across the little table, his broad jaw set like a vise.

"Don't make a nuisance of yourself —you understand?—or you'll find yourself where you'll be harmless for a while."

Gordon shook his head. "That won't work, you'll find."

"Won't it?" grimly.

"No, because you can't work it alone," retorted Gordon impatiently. "Man, can't you understand?"

Hudson thought a moment, looking into his eyes. "If I catch you overstepping the proprieties," he stated de-

liberately, "I'll thrash you within one inch of your life."

A curious chill ran over Gordon. Then a flush. Then another chill, lingering in the roots of his hair. His eyes narrowed.

"Yes," he answered meditatively, "you could do that, of course. What then?"

There was no answer. The scale trembled and turned. In the little globe of silence that seemed to shut them in from the tinkling, noisy room, Gordon found himself. When he spoke again he had no doubts.

"This isn't a trial of strength—you're stronger than I am. It isn't a

matter between you and me. It's a question of fact. If your understanding of this thing were true, I couldn't do anything. As it is, you can't do anything. You make the mistake of your kind in denying the existence of whatever is beyond your seeing. You might shoot me, but you won't; you might lock me up, but you can't. What you do doesn't matter. You can't beat me, because you can't beat us; you can't beat me, because you're in this for yourself, and I'm in it for something beyond myself; you can't beat me because I'm weaker than you and I'm afraid of you, and neither makes any difference to me. I win, because I have

the right, and I know. And I'm a Gordon, and *I won't stop.*"

Hudson leaned back in his chair, wondering at the new thing before him —the luminous face of a man transfigured. The world-old glint of battle smiled in his eyes.

"You're a man, Gordon," he growled, "if you are a damned fool."

"Thanks. For the rest, as you said, we'll see." The glamour faded, and Gordon's artistic sense came back with the remembering of his untasted glass.

"Here's my best regards." The glasses touched.

"Your good health, sir," said Hudson.

VII

THE resilient endurance of the human organism is perhaps the greatest wonder in a wonderful world. But any knowledge of its extent is both costly and painful to acquire. And through the numb diuturnity of the next two days Gordon learned that, although a man may drive himself by inherent will beyond his normal power and courage, yet he pays the price. Need borrows at usury. And the agony of sheer physical strain was to Gordon's occasional contemplation

an uncanny surprise. He was not conscious of any commensurate exertion.

For the situation was externally calm, and altogether inactive. Hudson was economical of scenes. He simply saw to it that Audrey and Gordon had no opportunity to solidify their nebulous relation. They were alone now and then, but momently, and at what he would have called "rational" times and places. So that the two were forced to bear their mutuality like a guiltiness. It was forbidden the honest light just when it most needed a foothold in the commonplace. There was nothing to be done, no occasion to justify the overt melo-

drama of an arranged meeting. They were together most of the time without speech of what was clamorous within them; and under this mockery of intercourse the uneasy tension grew and irritated, oppressive as the sultry hush before a thunderstorm. With no palpable change the whole party were uncomfortable together—except Hudson, who, insensible to electricity, was warily pleased to see his Fabian policy baffling the enemy. Miss Folcombe spoke to him uncomprehendingly of Gordon's nervous looks and inopportune silences.

"Nonsense, Aunt Elma," he reassured her, "it's your imagination.

Why, you don't even know just what you imagine, do you?"

Miss Folcombe floundered amid indefinities.

"Well, I guess there's nothing to worry over. And we'll be at Boulogne Friday. Don't put ideas in Audrey's head anyway."

Of course Miss Folcombe felt solely responsible and turned against Gordon all the intangible terror of the aroused chaperon. Gordon was politely made to feel unwelcome—so politely that he distrusted the feeling as perhaps only his own hypersensitiveness, and forced himself to disregard it. He drove himself to the light aimless talk, the little

ready courtesies, the frank steamer-intimacy which had all been so natural before; and he did it with a prickly consciousness of acting a part, with a restless urge toward activity where no act presented itself as advisable, with a weary sense of drifting before petty circumstance. His conversation with Hudson constantly took the form of small arguments, trifling contests of wisdom or of will, in which he seemed impalpably on trial before Audrey, and in which he nearly always got the worst of the encounter. The subjects somehow fell where he was at a disadvantage. If he refused battle Audrey would drive him into it with a question

or appeal. And Hudson was so courteous, so forbearing in his little victories, and so flawless in his unconsciousness, that Gordon could not for the life of him determine whether the lists were opened by his antagonist or by a nagging fate.

It was all so petty, in any aspect, that he was ashamed of minding it; but it was as deadly a sapping of his self-confidence as could readily have been devised. He was strung to a great event; and the heroic humor long leashed with no more worthy quarry than a cloud of flies, runs mad and rends its master. Gordon unreasonably despised himself for doing nothing, when in fact

nothing was to do. He was racing his engine.

He could not at all understand Audrey. This was natural. Solomon speaks wonderingly of the way of a man with a maid; it is tame and simple to the way of a maid with a man, which she herself walks blindly, dazed with light. But Gordon was used to understand people, and when the palimpsest of suggestion grew illegible he must needs go on reading, miserably bewildered among alternative interpretations.

Her silence worried him. She made no appeal, asked no counsel, never in their moments of privacy made any

mention of what had passed between them. She might have agreed with Hudson to obliviate romance. She sprinkled small-talk over the threshold of sincerity. And yet she never seemed unconscious. There was a tension under it all. She seemed to be always watching how he comported himself, weighing him in the balance; as if she had removed herself to a great distance from the struggle, whence she wisely smiled at him out of a tolerant, kindly omniscience, touched with a tinge of disappointment; as if she were contemplating some prettily youthful romance, being herself a very old person.

The sense that she was sitting in

judgment over him rasped Gordon's nerves; and her detachment seemed bitterly unfair. If she would only stand by his side, frankly defying opposition, the whole affair would become so inflexibly simple. What could stand in their way?

In his weakest hour Gordon asked a direct question. They were watching a school of porpoises overside.

"You knew that we had a talk day before yesterday?" he said.

She looked at him. "About what? Who?"

Gordon hated to phrase the obvious. "The governors of North and South Carolina."

"I don't know what you mean."

Gordon could not possibly have answered without irritation.

"I knew that you explained yourself to John about me," she said after a while, patiently.

"Did he and you talk it over?"

The pulse began visibly to beat in her brown throat.

"No," she answered, "he hasn't alluded to it at all." Then she added drily, "Not even to ask me if I knew of it."

Gordon shrank and grew white. She watched him struggle for sane words, looking quietly on him with a little droop at the corners of her mouth.

What she felt was only a warm mother-yearning to take him into her arms, calmly, without any passion, and kiss his hurt eyes and rest him and make him drowsy-happy, like a child comforted. But it was eleven in the morning on a crowded deck. Gordon read her look as kindly contempt, and she knew that, and somehow intended it. She turned seaward. "How can you be so serious on such a morning? Consider the fishes of the sea, how they swim."

If Gordon had read her eyes aright, he would have understood that in that moment it became possible for her to love him. But the man could not see, and the girl did not know.

VIII

HAT afternoon a gray film swept over sky and sea, and a heavy swell swung out of the deceiving northeast. Gordon spent the time alone, tramping nervously about the ship, alternately pondering impractical imaginations and trying aimlessly to get away from himself and rest. He was irritably unfit for company, and he didn't see why the devil he should feel so tired and shaky. It did not occur to him as important that, although he had not actually missed

food and sleep, yet for some days he had eaten tastelessly and slept like one in a fever; that he had forsaken his pipe, whereas the cigarette is a treacherous refuge in time of trouble; and that spiritual power frustrated reacts with cynical materialism upon the human liver. Moreover, the scale of his experiences had become unmeaning to him, like the notation of great numbers. He had no measure of events, and was surprised at the bodily evidence of stress.

Toward evening a chill rage of wind brought the rain, and the steamer wallowed sidelong through desolation. The sunlit blue of a few hours before

seemed as fictitious as the remembrance of June in January. Gordon visited the engine-room, tried his collegiate German and French on the steerage, and bored the mate with reminiscences of Clark Russell. He tried to write; but the harmonies refused to color, and each part seemed instinct with a perverse cantankerous individuality. So he returned to the wet deck with a certain relief in facing the active malice of the weather. Dinner was a rattling dreariness of empty seats. Soon afterward Miss Folcombe and Audrey disappeared; and Gordon, after an hour of expensively bad poker with Hudson and a couple of gentle-

manly nonentities, crawled into his berth with a dizzy headache.

To his unease of mind and body, sleep was absurd. He lay with closed eyes, listening to the irksome sea-noises, mechanically conscious of the motion of the vessel, of the steady whir and jar of the machinery, his thought pacing and turning and exploring its limitations like a caged beast. Every detail of the days rose before him in irregular review, now sharply sweet, now hotly shameful with distrust. He should have refused to play. It had been childish to break his bow—but what a gesture! . . . He had only borrowed complexity by telling Hudson. . . .

He had been fearless in what he saw to do. He had made no slip nor failure. . . . Where had he failed? Here, a wiser man would have restrained himself; there he had been trivially prudent before opportunity. . . . He was a theatrical young fool. . . . He was an old man in worldly wisdom —*"si la vieillesse pouvait!"* Ah, but if they both cared, nothing then could really matter—let God look after the means.

What was the next need? He planned feverishly, only to decide that he was wise in waiting until Audrey should be sure of herself. . . . And it was all so much harder for her! The

unsureness and the blindness of struggle, and the tangle of honor! . . . The beauty and the joy of her came upon him with a freshness that ached behind his eyes—the thousand little sweet ways of her, her daintily sure responses, her utter girlishness, her look or tone in saying this or that, the blessed faults that made her humanly real and dear. Then the thought of Hudson brought the horror of physical jealousy. She was all that a man might seek in her . . . and if it should all prove to be for *him!* Relentless imagination pictured Hudson holding fast her hands, her eyes on his with that same look in them, her lips—that way lay

madness; he shut out the vision of that lie.

And now the arch-doubt rearose, creeping about the crannies of his soul, and would not be disregarded. In cold soberness of reason, was he certain of himself? Could it be that this wonder-growth of days was actual, able to endure time and commonplace, a thing to live by always, that could not falter nor change? Was he not deceiving himself into an artistic ecstasy? Where was a sign by which he might know reality . . . what was love, after all? Gordon heard the specter out to the last word, and defied it face to face. "All right," he said aloud. "Suppose I am

mistaken and don't care in the right way. Suppose there's no such thing. Let it be all a lie—by God, I'll go on acting clear through as if it were utter truth!" Then he had rest from himself and fell into a sleep.

He awoke suddenly, looking into Audrey's eyes. Her face hung before him vignetted in the darkness, looking at him with that drawn longing he had seen once before. It was like that after-presence of a dream which sometimes reaches past awakening. He sat up and shook himself thoroughly awake.

She was still there, motionless, somehow with no impression of local-

ity, visible midway before him. He shut his eyes. That made no difference, and his hair crisped a little. He tried to go to sleep, but the urge of that mysterious look was not to be borne. Was he remembering it or did he actually seem to see her face?

"Oh, hell," he muttered, "this won't do. If I'm going to have 'em this way I'd better get some fresh air." He looked at his watch, surprised to find that it was not yet eleven, dressed, putting on a heavy sweater and a raincoat, and went on deck, misnaming himself for a whole asylum of fools.

The ship was lurching through a black wrath of wind and water, her

lights nebulous in the mingled rain and spray, a wet roar driving along her slippery decks. Gordon worked his way forward close to the rail, keeping his feet with difficulty, and half-choked by the salt gusts. Under the lee of a boat he made vain attempts to light his pipe. The matches flared and went out and he grew profane.

A darker shadow moved in the darkness at the other end of the boat, and a guarded laugh broke out.

"Richard, you're in the presence of a lady."

"Audrey! For Heaven's sake, child, what are you out here alone for?"

"Don't make such a noise, boy. Come here, and I'll give you some wet skirt to sit on."

He groped across to her. "You mustn't stay out here, dear. It's too insane—and besides, you'll get your death. Come."

"Richard, please don't make me go in. It'll be worse for me than staying." She caught at his hands. "Please—won't you believe me?" The dry tension of her voice meant something more than freakishness.

"What is it?"

"Come here." She drew him down beside her, keeping his left hand in both her own, and pressing her cheek

against his arm. It was as if she could not get close enough to him. She was shivering, and he threw his cape around her.

"I'm not cold." She had a heavy rug shawl-wise about her head and shoulders, and her hands were dry and warm. "Richard, I—I couldn't sleep —and I needed you. I just had to be out in the air, somehow. It wasn't silly."

"How long—?"

"Only a moment. I . . . tried to make you know."

He had no need to answer in words. Audrey raised her head and stared at

him, her lips apart, the darkness of her wide eyes a shimmering violet.

"Did you know? Was that why you came?" in a whisper. Her face hung before him in the mid-gloom, vaguely visible, terribly like his hallucination.

"Yes . . . that must be why I came."

She nestled back, saying, "Please don't speak to me, Richard, for a little while."

The spell of her seemed to shut them in. Fictitiously, from a strange distance, came the unsteady rush of the wind and the plashy sea-noises. She was alive and warmly real and infinitely woman. Gordon's questioning

weakness was vanquished before the face of her need, and his self-torment drowned fathoms deep in the sense of possession. He was quaintly alive to the commonplace: the rain chilled his cheek, the arm Audrey leaned against was numb, and his right foot cramped under him was going to sleep. Moreover, he was damply muffled in much clothes. Yet all these matters did not offend, nor intrusively jar, but were simply a part of joy, mysteriously harmonized in the deep reality of tenderness. The Kingdom of Heaven does not reject; it assumes.

The girl stirred. "Tell me how much you care."

"I care."

She shook her shoulders unsatisfied. "Not that way. That isn't what I want."

"I know. You're not ready yet for what you want, dear."

"Oh, stop thinking! There never was such a man as you, Richard. Will you never give me anything I don't drag out of you?"

In the pause he touched her hair with his lips—so lightly that perhaps she did not feel it. Presently she looked up at him.

"What do you mean?"

He answered slowly: "You aren't sure yet . . . of yourself—or our-

selves. You *want* to care. No, I can't make you see. Perhaps I myself don't understand, but . . . I mustn't let you confuse love and loving."

"You don't want me."

He laughed.

"No—you don't want me. You don't."

"If I accepted almost you, would you ever have more to give me?"

She sat up, holding the back of her left hand before his eyes.

"I noticed that ten minutes ago, child. What have you done with it?"

"It's overboard—to-night."

"Did you need to do a thing like that —to make yourself sure?"

"Richard—?" Her eyes were on his, with a look that was a faintness and a flame. As he bent over, she hesitated a moment, turning away her face. And then—the sweet shock dazed and blinded them like a violent blow. The girl shuddered back, whispering little broken phrases. The man set his teeth against dizziness. The dear wild thing in his arms was become his share of the world, her faltering breath the ebb and glow of infinity, the fragrance of her hair his meaning of life. And still he took note of the passing of time, ready to make an ending of their hour. At last Audrey broke the silence with the old, dry strain in her voice.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I don't believe in all this!"

Gordon bit his lips. He understood, and yet the mere words hurt him.

"Don't worry yourself, Audrey; don't try to think; just let things happen; it's all right."

"No, it isn't. It's a dream, Richard. We must drop it, and forget, just as I said. To-night's the end."

"It's only the beginning. Listen, dear. It's the suddenness and the difficulties and the melodrama of the situation that look unreal. We need time and commonplaces and a chance to make friends, you and I. We're safe. Only don't make climaxes. We can do

or not do as we choose, if only we trust ourselves, and wait."

"I can't wait. I can't bear it. Richard, if you want me you must come to Germany and marry me before I lose hold. Oh, hold me, and don't let me go!"

"I'll do that, or anything, if necessary—but we mustn't lose our heads. Now you must go in before some one misses you. It's a scandalous time of night."

She sat up and pushed back her heavy hair. "Yes, I must go in; and you must say good-by, Richard—perhaps for always. I mean it—you don't know."

"May I hurt you?" Gordon asked.

"I wish you would." Her smile was wonderful, if he could have seen it.

"Is any one else" . . . he paused for choice of words—"is any one else possible for you now . . . physically?"

She shrank as if he had struck her, and stared at him with a wondering horror in her eyes. After a moment he bent down and kissed her quietly.

"God help me—no!" she said, and put her two arms around his neck.

A firm, even step approached. Gordon stiffened every muscle. Audrey did not move.

"Your aunt's looking for you, Audrey," said Hudson.

IX

ITH difficulty Gordon rose and helped Audrey to her feet. The momentary walk through the wind-swept and heaving darkness was singularly long and unreal—the chill, the numbness in his right foot, the two silent shadows by his side. He found time to notice that his knees were shaking, that his headache had returned with dizzy intensity, as if to some other person, and that somebody was, absurdly enough, grow-

ing beyond question seasick. The chiseled wrath of Miss Folcombe framed in a yellow doorway was as meaningless as the empty words of good night. A door clicked shut, and the two men without a word turned back together whence they came. Gordon's attention was given to holding his teeth clenched and taking each step carefully. His hair was bristling, and he was hot and cold in waves, and his mouth was curiously dry. It was vaguely astonishing that his body continued to obey his will. Experimentally he worked his fingers. He had taken off his raincoat and was carrying it over his arm. Suddenly Hudson

turned upon him and struck him heavily in the face.

Gordon reeled back, catching at something to steady himself. A black horror of physical fear closed over him —not fear of a man, not fear of any injury or pain, only an agony to get away, to escape struggle, to hide and die. For an instant, he could have fallen on his face and cried for mercy; but there was a reason why he must not —he must not. It was a boat he was clinging to. He caught himself with a wrench that plucked loose the very roots of his soul, and rushed in at his enemy. He felt flesh against his hand.

There was a sick shock, and he was

down on the wet boards. He struggled up and lurched in again, coughing. There was no skill in such a fight—only darkness, and the shuffling of feet, and the blunt sound of blows, and the smell of sweat as the two bodies came together, and over all the ecstasy to do bodily hurt that is like the very passion of love, casting out pain and fear. Neither man could at all guard himself; but in darkness on an unsteady footing a man may strike at a face and miss. From the first, Hudson drove with careful fury at the lighter man's body.

It could not last. Time after time Gordon was dashed backward in a

choking heap. Again and again he scrambled to his feet and flung himself at the dim face that, as in a nightmare, he could not strike hard enough. Sometimes three or four blows went home, sometimes only one—and then the shock and the breathless pause and the renewal. No matter, he was still fighting. He had only to keep on . . . keep on. Both men were too angry to wrestle. If they closed, they broke savagely apart and fell to it afresh. If they slipped and went down, they struck out eagerly as they rose. There was very little noise. In the storm, one might have passed a few feet away unaware.

Presently Gordon fell sidewise against the rail, and hung over it, helpless, deathly sick. Hudson stood over him.

"Had about enough?" he asked after a moment.

The beaten man turned on him and laughed in his face.

"What's that got to do with it?" he snarled, and sprang at him again.

Hudson stepped back and threw his weight into the blow. It missed. Then his brain splashed full of light and his ears hummed. The two clenched, swayed, swung and fell violently, Gordon's head under the heavier man's chest.

Hudson lay a moment, panting. Then he slowly rose, brushing his hand across his eyes. It came away warmly wet. He fumbled for his handkerchief and checked the blood. The limp thing on the deck did not move. He bent down and found the pulse—only stunned, of course. He stood for a long moment, looking and listening. Then he deliberately put on Gordon's rain-coat, turning the collar up about his face. Then raising the inert weight in his arms, he made his way aft. At the door of Gordon's state-room a flurried steward asked what was the matter.

"Fell against a boat and hit his

head," said Hudson calmly. "No, he's all right—knocked him out, that's all."

He laid Gordon in his berth, and looked in the glass. No, he could not afford to be questioned. As he turned away Gordon opened his eyes. He looked bewilderedly about the room, saw Hudson, and tried to raise himself; fell back and closed his eyes again.

"Doctor'll be here in a minute," said Hudson. "How are you—all right?"

The eyes opened again and stared insolently into Hudson's.

"You lose," Gordon said wearily. "Your game's played. Now go—I'm tired."

Hudson pressed the button and went

out. As he shut himself unobserved into the safety of his own state-room, he discovered fear.

The sense of unreality—of moving in a painted world where all things were and were not, and she herself a figure grimacing through a pantomime to be looked at with dry curiosity from a distance—hung about Audrey like a veil. Mercifully, it enabled her to face Miss Folcombe's midnight homily in an impervious silence. With nothing to say, she literally said nothing, and was not to be driven from that refuge; even when the kindly old lady, stung with the sense of exclusion—as if she were

somehow trying to reach a wife—lashed bitterly at those sensitive places whereof her own womanhood reminded her. Audrey listened intact, intellectually conscious of hearing that which no woman may endure from another woman, and wondering why this image that was herself felt neither anger nor any shame.

"It's a pity you feel it so much," she said at the end.

Miss Folcombe gasped. "Feel it—it's nothing to me!" and went to bed in a sniffing gust of tears. Audrey wondered why she did not feel sorry for her.

All through the next day the veil

thickened and increasingly she wondered at herself. In the afternoon Hudson appeared, and they had a long calm talk together, reviewing all the facts of those immeasurably distant yesterdays when she had been cast aside from the rational levels of life by a wind of unreasoning emotion. Somebody was in calm agreement over these unfortunate but nowise miraculous matters. Somebody agreed that most highly strung people had at some time an outburst of impossible romance and that they themselves were fortunate in getting the distemper over with before their marriage. There was no danger now of any further disturb-

ance to their solid and durable liking for each other. Somebody saw how different was this comfortable daylight from the fever-fit of an evanescent passion—which, rightly understood, was even a part of emanation from their consistent normality—a satellite, shot off burning into space as their world cooled and shrank to habitable proportions. Somebody was meeting the big, dumb man half-way in finding expression for these things, and felt an almost strange kindliness toward him. Somebody would have married John Hudson just then, as Somebody had agreed to do some months before—if he had understood his need to bind her in that

moment, and had taken care not to awaken Audrey, who, from the uttermost corner of herself, was looking dreamily out across duality and wondering whether a black eye would have had so coarse a look upon the face of Richard Gordon.

"I'd better speak to him before he leaves us in the morning," said Somebody at last.

"You'd better not see him at all," replied Hudson.

"Oh, there'll be no excitement—you'd better be in the room. Only I owe it to us all to tell him myself, I think. Goodness knows, I've made enough trouble."

"What will you say?" slowly. "He won't believe you."

"No, but he'd take longer to believe in circumstances. Oh, just as you like, of course. It makes no real difference."

Hudson looked long into her eyes, his battered brows bent into a knot, reading and weighing all that he saw and knew.

"No," he said at length, "I don't see how it can alter the facts, if you control yourself. Go ahead."

X

TOWARD evening Gordon came out of a fever to find a note under his pillow. After a while he remembered putting it there in one of his past lives. He lay still, in that pallid surprise of the senses that follows fever, watching the dancing shadow-globes on wall and deck, and thinking as hard as his head would let him.

"I haven't skipped a day, have I?" he asked the doctor an hour later. "When do we make Boulogne?"

"No, we're in the Channel now. We'll be there early to-morrow morning. How do you feel?"

Richard detailed his symptoms. "I've got to get off at Boulogne, you see."

The doctor scowled. "You're one bruise, and three of your ribs are loosened in front—if you were twenty years older, they'd be smashed in like an old basket. But it isn't that—you don't react properly—your nerves are all drawn. You've been dragging the vitality out of yourself, somehow—got anything on your mind?"

"Well, I haven't got much on my stomach."

The doctor grinned. "You're the only man I ever saw who could keep a secret when he was delirious. I think you'd better go on to Hamburg. You'll save by it in the long run."

After supper, Gordon succeeded in getting into his clothes. His head was hollow, and his hands and feet ran through assorted sizes. But he could walk after a fashion, and that was the main thing. He found Audrey in a corner of the saloon, pretending, as he came across to her, to be reading a magazine. At the other end of the room Hudson and Miss Folcombe were playing cribbage.

"Hello!" he said, dropping dizzily

into a seat. "What is it you've got to say to me?"

Audrey put down the periodical.

"I'm glad you're about again. How do you feel?"

"I don't feel. Come to Hecuba."

She glanced across at Hudson, then back at him. "Why . . . you don't show at all."

Gordon laughed. "Oh, I got mine without any time wasted in spoiling my manly beauty." He stopped, looked at her a moment, and said abruptly and sharply. "Come out of it—now—and say what you've planned to say."

The veil fell. The numbness melted, and all that lived in Audrey awoke in

a breath to suffer and to struggle and to know. The speech that she drove herself to make was an agony, a grappling with that other self who had suddenly become a tyrant and a torturer, darkly glorious with that dearest, deadliest sin of a good woman—the frozen courage of renunciation.

"Richard, I—I want to tell you that it's all over. It's impossible. I think I love you in some beautiful, unreal way—but I shall never marry you, and I *shall* marry John. You don't believe that, but it's right and it's true, and it must be so. I can't trust or live with the part of myself that answers to you. It isn't me—it's above and apart from

me, not for every day. I can't breathe the air you live in year after year—I should starve in it. I need a big, strong, earthly man, reeking with humanity. I must be the soul for the two, not he. You must try to understand and forgive me. I hate to hurt you, dear, but you will come to see that I did it only to be kind. I'm quite myself now, and I've found out exactly how I feel. I'm right and I'm sure, and you must face the fact and believe what I say. You must never speak to me again."

"Is that all? I'm sorry you've worked yourself into such a state."

"It is all. Believe it as soon as you can—and . . . good-by."

He leaned back in the corner of the wall, gazing at her as upon an old and familiar thing.

"Do you think I don't understand? You're in a martyrdom—the devil's pet lie."

"You don't understand, Richard."

"Sit down. Why did you feel that you must send for me to *say* these things?"

In the silence Audrey looked at last into the face of her other self.

"All that sort of talk is absurd, you see. And now I'll tell you why—because you are not going to bid a beautiful dream farewell. Instead of that, you are going to Paris to-morrow, with

an impecunious fiddler by the name of Richard Gordon."

There was no magnetism of energetic will in his weary voice, no empire in his eyes. He was simply stating a fact grown trite with long possession. He had no sense of dominance, of meeting a great moment—only a certainty impassive as the consciousness of his own existence, that the truth was as he said. He had no triumph, even, no glory in winning the prize of the great struggle of his life that had made and proved him a man. He hardly felt just then any emotion of his love for the woman. Only, it was a trouble to find words for the emphasis of truism; and

he was very tired. After a little pause he gathered words again, and in a few sharp, impersonal sentences outlined his plan, simply, clearly, so that even through the bright haze of her attention she could make no material mistake. She was looking at him with something of the overtaken, half-horrified surprise that his first careless heart-reading had brought into her eyes a week before; but there was a difference—an ineffable difference, like the change in the melody he had made and played for her one night.

"And I might have married that man if he hadn't let me speak to you," she said at last, softly.

Gordon shook his head. "Wouldn't have made a bit of difference, dear. If you still think it would, we'll wait."

She turned her head away. "When . . . did I begin to care?" she asked.

He smiled his quaint smile. She read it.

"I know—but say when."

"When you jumped on me for losing my sand and asking questions—that day on deck."

Her eyes filled suddenly and she rose, holding out her left hand.

"Yes—you do know now. Good night."

She hurried across the room, head bent. Hudson stopped her at the door.

"Well?"

"You brute!" she whispered. "You brute!" and brushed past. There was that in her face which Hudson had never seen.

He stood a moment frowning. Then he shook his head like a wounded beast and followed her. Gordon looked at his watch and deliberately lighted a cigarette.

Next morning after breakfast Miss Folcombe and Hudson were standing by the rail, looking out over the smoky, sun-twisted roofs and spires of Boulogne-sur-Mer. Miss Folcombe was pointing out objects of interest with a comment of mingled memory and

Baedeker. Gordon came up behind them, violin-case in hand.

"Good morning, and good-by," he said.

Miss Folcombe's bow was a model in its kind. Hudson said, a little awkwardly, "I thought you'd gone ashore earlier."

"I've been ashore since five o'clock. Where's Miss Dorne?"

"Perhaps," said Hudson slowly, "you'd better go before she comes up. You two said all you had to say last night, didn't you?"

Miss Folcombe had turned away to look critically at a laughing group of tourists who in turn were much inter-

ested in the steerage passengers. She had subtly included Hudson in the act, so that Gordon was somehow impalpably removed to a distance.

Gordon looked at his watch. "I'm going in just ten minutes. In the meanwhile—"

Miss Folcombe interrupted with a gasp. Audrey was coming toward them. It was the change in her dress that had astonished Miss Folcombe. Hudson, slower to translate observation, gathered his brows into an unsymmetrical frown as Audrey joined the group.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"We're going ashore," Gordon answered deliberately. "At half-past ten we're going to be married at the American vice-consulate. After that, we're going on to Paris on the eleven-eighteen."

For the second time Hudson was in the presence of the inconceivable. For the second time he showed no sign of wavering.

"Oh, no, you're not," he growled.

"Why?" said Audrey quietly.

"Because you are not going to do anything in a hurry. You're not a captive heroine, you know. There's no occasion for melodrama. And whether you see it or not, I want you to have

time to decide your own future rationally, in your own way. Let me take your things."

Gordon had been watching, as if for an expected cue.

"Just as you like," he put in; "we'll wait, if you say so."

The iron bent. Hudson looked from one to the other without understanding.

"Don't you see," Audrey spoke very gently, almost regretfully, as one refuses a pleasure to a child, "that it doesn't really make any difference—here and now, or at home after going over everything with father?"

Miss Folcombe spluttered into the pause with a half-hysterical invective.

"Wait a moment," Audrey broke in; "let's hear what John says."

The iron man turned slowly to the man of steel.

"You knew I could stop this plan if you told me of it?"

"Of course. What would be the use?"

The iron cracked and broke. Hudson bent his heavy head a little, as if he were shouldering up some great weight. Then he looked up steadily into the other man's eyes.

"In the Middle Ages, I'd have beaten you," he said. "As it is, I think I'll go to your wedding. Come, Aunt Elma."

Miss Folcombe caught at the rail, drawing breath for an outburst. Could a well-bred God behold these impossibilities and withhold miraculous fire? But the electric sense of a scene had spread over the twittering deck. There was a stillness, as in a meadow under the passing of a cloud. People began to whisper and to glance curiously their way. In the chaos of the proprieties, amid the shards of her universe tumbling about her chiseled ears, Miss Folcombe remembered her ancestors and became, after her own fashion, heroic. She threw herself conventionally upon Audrey's neck.

"Good-by, dear," she cried in the

voice of publicity. "I'll see you again at the station. And I hope you have a perfectly lovely time!"

And Richard and Audrey, clear-eyed against all the trouble before them, wise in the knowledge of themselves and of the battle wherein all victory is but a challenge and a beginning, went down together into the old-world city with Summer in their hearts.

THE END

39
HOCHSCHILD, KOHN &